

Background

In December 2005, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Board approved a process for the selection of a Headquarters Office. A set of specific criteria was approved and a committee of the Board was appointed to work with staff and the Department of General Services in developing a recommendation to the full Board. In February 2006, the SNC Board selected Auburn as the location for the interim Headquarters Office. At that time, the Board directed the Executive Officer to continue to explore options for a permanent Headquarters Office within roughly a 30 minute drive of Auburn.

Since June 2006, SNC staff has been housed at Creekside Business Park in Auburn. The Auburn office generally meets the organization's needs and presents a positive work environment. The location has proven to provide good access to the major transportation corridors and generally meets the criteria established. The current lease extends through May 2009.

Last year, the SNC opened and staffed its offices in Mariposa, Susanville and Bishop. While these offices will allow the SNC to more effectively cover the area within the Region, their presence does not significantly affect the criteria established for the headquarters office. A decision to relocate from our current location will be based on an opportunity to improve organizational efficiency and more fully meet the selection criteria, including the items described below:

Basic Requirements

- Located within a 30 minute drive of Auburn;
- Provides a minimum of 8,000 – 10,000 square feet of usable office space available by June 2009;
- Meet all state office-building requirements (ADA, etc.);
- Access to high speed internet.

Preferences

- Access to major north-south and east-west transportation corridors (I-5, Hwy 99, Hwy 395, I-80, Hwy 99 and Hwy 49);
- Access to meeting facilities for SNC meetings beyond conference room capacity;
- Convenient access for employees to schools, affordable housing, alternative transportation and other services;
- Opportunity for the SNC to contribute to the economic well-being of the community;
- The opportunity for a "green building" that is in keeping with the State's efforts to increase energy efficiency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and generally reduce the impact on the environment;

- The opportunity to utilize the facility for Regional educational and interpretive activities, consistent with our mission;
- The opportunity for the SNC to contribute to the local community through public use of the SNC facility.

Current Status

Consistent with the Board's direction, the SNC solicited Preliminary Proposals following the March Board meeting. A total of five proposals were received from the following communities: Auburn (2), Colfax, Coloma and Nevada City. Staff has visited each of the sites and discussed options with proposal sponsors. The purpose of this phase was to gain a basic understanding of the potential opportunities and how well they met our criteria and did not involve substantial analysis as to feasibility.

Each of the sites proposed offer positive attributes consistent with our criteria. In two of the proposals, the site is currently bare land and the landowner is interested in entering into an agreement with the State of California to construct an office building to meet the SNC's needs (Nevada City and Coloma). Another site offers a similar opportunity (Auburn), where the plan is for multi-agency building including local and federal agencies. The Colfax location offers an existing building that would be refurbished to meet the SNC's needs (although it is unclear as to the desires of the current owner). The final proposal comes from the owners and managers of our current office location in Auburn.

If the SNC is to pursue the search for a new facility, it would require the full involvement of the Department of General Services (DGS), the agency responsible for securing and managing the State's building assets. Based on discussions with DGS, it appears that this process would take more than 6 months at a moderate cost to the SNC. It is also unlikely that the DGS would enter into any agreement with the landowner that commits the State prior to construction occurring. In other words, a "build to suit" option does not appear feasible.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board direct the Executive Officer to pursue the extension of the lease at the current location, and in doing so, seek to achieve progress towards additional criteria, including "greening" of the building and increasing the availability of education and interpretative opportunities at the site.

This recommendation is made, recognizing that a number of the sites identified would be attractive alternatives to the existing facility. However given the complexity of the process, staff does not believe the benefits outweigh cost, time and effort associated with securing a new location.

If the SNC is not successful with the negotiation of a longer term lease at the current location, exploring other options in the future should remain an option.